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ABSTRACT

Relationships between children's trust of a teacher and achievement, attitude toward school, and pupil-teacher interaction patterns were studied in fouth-grade classrooms. Trust was found to be positively correlated with arithmetic achievement and liking of school--but only for the girls. No positive relationships existed between trust and the interaction categories for either sex. However, a negative relationship was found between a girl's trust of her teacher and the number of unsolicited child-centered behaviors the girl received from the teacher. It was suggested that personality variables may be more significant than the immediate interaction patterns in determing a child's trust of a teacher and that the sex of both pupil and teacher should be considered when studying trust in the classroom. (Author)

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Correlates of Trust of a Teacher in 4th-Grade Classrooms

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Correlates of Trust of a Teacher in 4th Grade Classrooms

Statement of Problem

A number of people have stressed the importance of having a child see the teacher as trustworthy. Hobbs (1966) calls trust "the beginning point of a new learning experience (p. 1110)," and Erikson (1959) contends that for a child to develop a healthy personality trust must be established not only with parents, but with peers and teachers as well.

Despite its purported significance, only one study has been reported linking trust to the school setting. Using 4th grade children, Imber (1973) found trust in a teacher to be correlated with grades in arithmetic, but unrelated to reading. As an explanation of this finding, Imber speculates that arithmetic may require more direct communication with the teacher, and it is this interaction component that moderates the trust-performance relationship. This suggests the importance of looking at relationships between trust and pupil-teacher interactions along with its relationship to such standard educational criterea as academic achievement and attitudes toward school.

Studies on classroom "social climate" consistently find that warm, nurturant, more responsive teachers have pupils with higher achievement, more positive attitudes toward school and their teachers, have a greater participation rate, and show more interest in activities (e.g. Jackson, 1968; Lewin, Lippett, & White, 1938; White, 1969). Similarly, Flanders (1970) reports that teachers employing an indirect approach (e.g. making use of student ideas, praising and

encouraging, accepting feelings, etc.) are more effective on a variety of criterea. From these studies it might be hypothesized that "child-centered" teachers are trusted more than those who do not exhibit this type of behavior pattern.

However, based on formulations of various theorists in the area of trust (Deutsch, 1962; Erikson, 1959) it is suggested that not all forms of child-centered behaviors are related to trust at the 4th grade level. In the adult, according to Deutsch (1962), two factors thought to be important in determining one's perception of another's trustworthiness are (1) the extent to which another satisfies one's needs and (2) the perceived motivation underlying the other's behavior. Of these two factors, Erikson's (1959) theory would indicate that need satisfaction is the more important determinant in the early stages of psychosocial development. It can be deduced from this stage theory that the ability to make attributions about another's underlying intentions is not part of a young child's cognitive repetoire. Rather, trust at this age level is determined largely by the extent to which another reinforces the child's dependency needs.

This would suggest that for 4th graders the perceived trustworthiness of a teacher would be related only to child-centered behaviors which were directly solicited by the child, for under these circumstances the child would be having his/her stated needs reinforced. Unsolicited child-centered behaviors, on the other hand, would appear to be indicants of Deutsch's (1962) second factor and, therefore, should not affect the degree of trust.

Subjects and Procedures

Volunteers were recruited from 4th grade classrooms in three

predominantly-white elementary schools in-and-around a moderately large Northeastern city. After being briefed on the procedures, seven teachers (six females and one male) volunteered their classrooms, each containing approximately 20 pupils. Written parental consent was secured for all but three of the pupils. The resulting seven teachers and 140 pupils (69 boys and 71 girls) served as subjects.

Pupil-teacher interactions were tape-recorded in each classroom during twelve 30-minute sessions over a one-month period. To allow us to identify the pupils, each wore an alphabetic letter during the recording session, and one of two male observers was present to note which pupils were involved in the interactions. As a rationale for our presence, the children were told we were interested in "seeing what boys and girls do in the 4th grade."

While twelve sessions were recorded, only the last nine were analyzed. The first three sessions served merely to allow the class to adjust to the presence of an observer and the recording equipment. The interactions were coded from the tape recordings by the observer present at the session using a category system modified from Flanders (1970). To obtain measures of reliability, twelve randomly chosen sessions were coded by both observers, and a Pearson correlation coefficient computed for each category. The categories employed along with the obtained reliability coefficients are given in Table 1.

Following the last tape-recorded session, a forced choice questionnaire was group-administered to the pupils. The teacher was not present during the testing session, and the children were

assured their responses would be kept confidential. The questionnaire contained a one-item measure of attitude toward school requiring a "Yes-No" response and a 40-item trust scale developed by Imber (1973). The Imber Trust Rating Scale is composed of four subscales, indexing a child's trust of "Mother," "Father," "Peers," and "Teachers." Although all items were administerd, only those pertaining to trust of teachers were used in the major analyses. National percentile ranks on reading and arithmetic portions of standardized achievement tests were obtained from the school principals and served as measures of the child's achievement.

Upon completion of the data-analysis, teachers were given feedback on their own interaction patterns. To protect the participants right to privacy, the individual profiles of other teachers and the data obtained from a particular child were not made available.

Results

Pearson correlation coefficients computed between a child's trust of the teacher and the various scholastic indices are reported in Table 2 for both sexes combined and for boys and girls separately. For the combined-sex data, trust was marginally related to the child's arithmetic achievement, but unrelated to reading. See below. The same trend existed for the trust-attitude toward school relationship. Girls who trusted their teacher also liked school, while boys showed only a trend in this direction ($p < .20$).

Most coefficients obtained between trust and the pupil-teacher interaction categories indicate a similar pattern. Where a significant correlation was found overall, it can be attributed to the relationship between trust and that category for girls only. The one

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However, the analysis broken down by sex revealed that the positive correlation held only for girls ($r = .22$; $p < .08$).

exception involved the nonchild-centered category, "criticism." Here the combined-sex coefficient was significant in the negative direction, but the coefficients for boys and girls taken separately were not ($p < .15$ for boys and $p < .12$ for girls).

The specific hypotheses concerned relationships between trust and the child-centered interaction categories. Results did not support the predictions. While the "solicited" category showed no relationship to trust for either sex, unsolicited child-centered behaviors and trust were negatively correlated for girls. A negative relationship was also found between trust and the pupil category, "uninitiated," indicating that the more a girl was forced to speak by the teacher, the less she trusted that teacher.

Conclusions

The positive relationships of trust with arithmetic achievement and attitude toward school suggest that trust in a teacher is, in fact an important part of the learning experience --- for girls, at any rat However, what (if any) classroom behavior patterns enhance or account for these relationships is not at all clear, for no significant positive coefficients were obtained between trust and the pupil-teacher interaction categories.

On the other hand, the results indicate that certain behavior patterns are detrimental to developing trust. It seems evident that a 4th grade girl does not like to be singled out as the object of a teacher's attention. To the child, a teacher may represent an authority figure whose role it is to direct, present content material, and, in general, create an impersonal environment for learning to take place. Personalizing the situation may not be part of the teacher's

expected role behaviors. When the teacher engages in behaviors contrary to the impersonal role expectations, the child may not perceive the teacher as a reliable individual, resulting in a lower degree of trust.

It is, of course, possible that classroom interaction is not important as a determinant of trust of a teacher. Rather, a child may enter the classroom with an already-formed predisposition toward trusting other people based on past experiences with parents, peers, and other teachers. Such dispositions may simply be generalized to the present teacher, quite independent of current interaction patterns. To test this supposition, all four subscales of the Imber Trust Rating Scale (1973), which constitutes a measure of general trust in others, were intercorrelated, and the total trust score (based on all 40 items) was correlated with the achievement and attitude measures. The resulting coefficients provide some support for this explanation. All four subscales were significantly intercorrelated ($p < .001$) with coefficients ranging from +.36 to +.66. In addition, the total trust score was positively related to both arithmetic achievement ($r = +.16$, $df = 138$, $p < .06$) and attitude toward school ($r = +.14$, $p < .10$) for the combined-sex data.

Why only the girls showed significant relationships between trust and the criteria measures is puzzling. One factor may be the teacher's sex, for in the present study six of the seven teachers were also females. When the data for the one male teacher was analyzed separately, the resulting correlation pattern was quite similar to that reported for all the teachers. However, there was one noteworthy exception. The boys' data revealed a significant relationship

between trust of the male teacher and attitude toward school (r =+.56, df =10, $p < .05$), while girls in the class displayed only a trend in this direction (r =+.46, df = 7, $p < .20$). Thus, perhaps the sex of both teacher and pupil should be considered in future studies.

As indicated by its significant relationships with achievement and attitude, a child's trust of a teacher does appear to be relevent for effective school adjustment. However, the reasons for its importance is still a matter of conjecture. The present study appears to have raised a number of questions and provided few definitive answers. One of the only firm conclusions that can be drawn is that more research is needed to determine the nature of the trust relationship in the school setting.

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Table 1

Definitions and Reliability Coefficients of Categories Used to Measure Pupil-Teacher Interaction

Category	Definition	Reliability Coefficient
Pupil Behavior		
Initiated	Voluntary behaviors, including content- and non-content related questions, suggestions, comments, assistance-seeking, and answering teacher-posed questions	.91
Uninitiated	Responses made when directly asked to do so by the teacher	.88
Teacher Behavior		
Child-centered	Behaviors indicating positive concern for the children, their welfare and/or their understanding of content material. Includes empathetic comments, praise, and acceptance or elaboration of pupil ideas	.92
Solicited	Child-centered behaviors in response to a pupil-initiated behavior	
Unsolicited	Child-centered behaviors which have been preceded by a pupil-uninitiated behavior or a nonchild-centered behavior (see below)	
Nonchild-centered	Statements initiated by the teacher, involving lecturing, giving directions, and/or negative comments about a child or the class as a whole	.94
Lecture/direction	Nonchild-centered behaviors involving statements about content material; directing the child or class; and statements of intention (e.g., "I'm going to read this book")	.95
Criticism	Negative comments indicating dissatisfaction with pupil work and/or behavior	.94

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients of a Child's Trust of a Teacher with Achievement, Attitude, and Classroom Behavior

Scholastic Indices	Overall (n=140)	Boys (n=69)	Girls (n=71)
Liking of School	.17**	.09	.24**
Achievement			
Arithmetic	.16*	-.12	.22*
Reading	.02	.09	.17
Pupil Behavior			
Initiated	.01	.06	-.05
Uninitiated	-.13	-.07	-.22*
Teacher Behavior			
Child-centered			
Solicited	-.02	-.10	-.07
Unsolicited	-.18**	-.11	-.26**
Nonchild-centered			
Lecture/direction	.06	.03	-.05
Criticism	-.19**	-.18	-.19

** $p \leq .05$

* $p \leq .08$